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Duxbury Performing Arts Center  
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# A peek behind the curtain

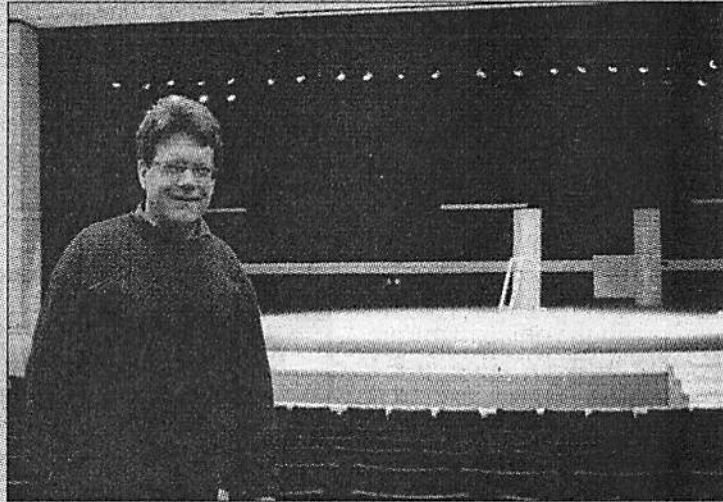
Taking a closer look at the PAC with the director

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Duxbury is abuzz with talk of a school building project that may bring a new co-located middle school/high school to town. But seven years ago, another school project was at the center of a fierce debate.

In 2001, voters were presented with several school projects bundled together. In addition to expansions at Alden and Chandler elementary schools, there was

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PAC Manager Tony Kelso stands in the auditorium. Kelso has worked at the building since its opening seven years ago.

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# A peek behind the curtain

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a proposal for a 1,000 seat auditorium that would cover the lack of such a facility at Alden. The "Performing Arts Center" would be reserved mostly for school use, but would also be open to community use (such as Town Meeting) or rental by outside groups.

"The three schools in the St. George Street school complex [Alden, Duxbury High School and Duxbury Middle School] need and can effectively share this new performing arts space," wrote then-Superintendent of Schools Eileen Williams in a March 7, 2001 op/ed for the Clipper. "Community groups and citizens can benefit through multiple uses of this enlarged auditorium. Taxpayers and students alike can reap the benefits of such a center while the state funds the majority share (67 percent) of the cost."

## PAC INCOME/EXPENSES 2004-2011

Year	Income	Expenses	Net
2004-2005	\$77,893/39,220	\$118,573	-\$1,460*
2005-2006	\$32,678	\$31,218	+\$1,460
2006-2007	\$58,742	\$58,592	-\$150
2007-2008	\$76,625	\$76,859	-\$384
2008-2009	\$46,394	\$62,868	-\$16,858
2009-2010	\$76,672	\$59,784	+\$16,814
2010-2011	\$59,000 (est.)	\$58,000 (est.)	+\$1,000 (est.)

\* 2004 includes donations to PAC construction fund and regular income. Expenses reflect the final phase of construction in 2004.

\*\* This figure is due to only partial payment of fees by several arts organizations by the June 30, 2009 deadline due to recession related issues. Late fees were paid in first month of fiscal year 09/10 - see next year's income figures.

Income is from fees charged to all non-school organizations and events outside of normal school hours. Expenses include all salaries, including those for all school events, and all expenses related to school and non-school events.

Source: Tony Kelso

The project was approved, and seven years later, the Performing Arts Center, or PAC, still hosts mostly school events, but it has also been home to a firefighters' convention, Duxbury's annual Town Meeting, the Plymouth Philharmonic and Atlantic Symphony Orchestra and many other events and festivals.

Tony Kelso has been the PAC's manager since it opened. He, along with Technical Director Darren MacFarlane, are the center's sole employees.

"He really makes things happen," Kelso said of MacFarlane, who also works in the school department. "The place would not function without him."

MacFarlane also helps organize the PAC's high school staff. For things like the Festival of Music, which takes place in the building every April, as well as other shows, high schoolers are hired to do much of the backstage and front of house work.

"It's great for the high school kids," Kelso said. "They get a lot of real world experience."

The PAC's scheduling works on a tiered system. When the building was built, a promise was made to honor requests from the school department first. Town uses get next priority, followed by outside groups - although Kelso said he hasn't had to turn anyone away because of a scheduling conflict yet.

"That's worked well. It's a tough thing to juggle at times," he said.

Starting in mid-October, the PAC is busy, through January up until February, before the school vacation, Kelso said. Town Meeting is in March, and during the spring there are music and dance festivals.

"The challenge is always the summer," Kelso said. "It's a hard time to fill with groups because people are busy."

There is a pricing matrix

Arts Center's Web site. Renting the auditorium itself is \$100 per hour (there is a four hour minimum) for a local non-profit group, and for profit or outside groups pay more. That's just the base, however, things like the rehearsal room and lobby, audio equipment and lighting, the use of the grand piano, front of house staff and custodial services are all an additional cost. (See the full list at [duxbury.k12.ma.us/pac](http://duxbury.k12.ma.us/pac).) The PAC does not charge the schools or town to hold their events there, but even groups like the Music Promoters pay a fee to, at the very least, cover the operating costs of the event.

The numbers for the first two years of the building were built into the school budget. However, in the years since, 2004-2011, the facility has more or less broken even (see chart).

However, Kelso said those numbers don't include the staff costs that would be incurred during school-sponsored events if the PAC was just the Alden auditorium.

For this year, Kelso is expecting that by the end of June they'll have a gross of \$60,000. He pointed out that the PAC only charges flat fees, not a percentage of the door, so even big, well-attended events like last year's Rosanne Cash concert don't make any more money for them than other events.

"We know what we're getting whether one person or 1,000 shows up," he said. "People see this big, large place and they think it could be a cash cow, but that's a hard thing to pull off."

Kelso is in an association with other local performing arts center managers, and the problems Duxbury struggles with affects them all.

"They're all talking about how hard it is to predict [income] these days," he said.

There aren't too many other auditoriums like the PAC on the South Shore. Plymouth's

lar size, but operates under a slightly different model (the building is town owned, but a management company runs the facility.) Kelso said he feels like the word is getting out about Duxbury's facility.

"People all over the South Shore and Plymouth County are aware of it now," he said.

"What's good about the PAC is it hasn't always been performances," he said, pointing to the firefighters conference Duxbury recently hosted. "It's things like that that I like seeing here because it's a mix of stuff."

Kelso feels the PAC has achieved many of the goals set out in the original plan, and moving forward he hopes to keep up the relationships he's built with local groups while expanding awareness of the center.

"To me it's fulfilled very much of what the original intent was," he said.

Someday, he'd like to see the PAC host its own performance series, maybe a small festival of 6-8 events a year. Although such a series could help the PAC become more profitable, it takes an up-front investment first, which is unlikely in this economic climate.

Kelso is also hoping to finish the orchestra pit in the PAC, which needs another \$25-30,000 worth of work.

"That will be a selling point," he said, pointing to the donated grand piano that generate additional rental fees.

"I think the PAC can keep doing what its doing," Kelso said of the school-first focus. "It's that kind of thing that this place was made for."

At the same time, he wants to raise the community awareness of what's going on inside the looming facade.

"I hope people see it as a community asset," he said. "It shouldn't be just for the school population ... [The community at-large] should feel that this is theirs too."